

## Early Cacao Use in the Upper Amazon of South America

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### Author(s):

Sonia Zarrillo<sup>1\*</sup>, Nilesh Gaikwad<sup>2</sup>, Claire Lanaud<sup>3</sup>, Terry Powis<sup>4</sup>, Christopher Viot<sup>3</sup>, Isabelle Lesur<sup>5,6</sup>, Olivier Fouet<sup>3</sup>, Xavier Argout<sup>3</sup>, Erwan Guichoux<sup>5</sup>, Franck Salin<sup>5</sup>, Rey Loor Solorzano<sup>7</sup>, Olivier Bouchez<sup>8</sup>, Hélène Vignes<sup>3</sup>, Patrick Severts<sup>9</sup>, Julio Hurtado<sup>10</sup>, Alexandra Yepez<sup>10</sup>, Louis Grivetti<sup>11</sup>, Michael Blake<sup>12</sup> and Francisco Valdez<sup>13</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, UCLA, CA, USA. <sup>2</sup>Gaikwad Steroidomics Laboratory, Davis, CA, USA. <sup>3</sup>CIRAD, UMR AGAP, INRA, Montpellier SupAgro, Montpellier, France. <sup>4</sup>Department of Geography and Anthropology, Kennesaw State University, GA, USA. <sup>5</sup>INRA-UMR BIOGECO, Cestas, France. <sup>6</sup>HelixVenture, Mérignac, France. <sup>7</sup>Instituto Nacional de Investigación Agropecuaria, Estación Experimental Tropical Pichilingue, Quevedo, Provincia de Los Ríos, Ecuador. <sup>8</sup>INRA, GeT-PlaGe, Genotoul, Castanet-Tolosan, France. <sup>9</sup>New South Associates Inc., Stone Mountain, GA, USA. <sup>10</sup>Ministerio de Cultura y Patrimonio, Ecuador/IRD, Quito, Ecuador. <sup>11</sup>Department of Nutrition, University of California, Davis, CA, USA. <sup>12</sup>Department of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. <sup>13</sup>Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, UMR 208 PALOC, MNHN-IRD, Marseille, France. \*e-mail: [szarrillo@gmail.com](mailto:szarrillo@gmail.com).

**Abstract** - The archaeological site of Santa Ana-La Florida (SALF), located in the Ecuadorian upper Amazon, is in the region of *Theobroma* spp. greatest genetic diversity, thus making it ideal to investigate the origins of domestication of this enigmatic tree. We present research showing that the residents of SALF were involved in the domestication of cacao, traditionally thought to have been first domesticated in Mesoamerica and/or Central America. We used three independent lines of evidence—starch grains, theobromine residues and ancient DNA—dating from approximately 5,300 years ago, to establish the earliest evidence of *T. cacao* use in the Americas, the first unequivocal archaeological example of its pre-Columbian use in South America and reveal the upper Amazon region as the oldest centre of cacao domestication yet identified. We suggest that new paleoethnobotanical research will expand our knowledge of this process, including the timing, locations, and uses of cacao by Indigenous South Americans.

<https://ethnobiology.org/conference/sessions/42/xx-frontiers-domestication-research>